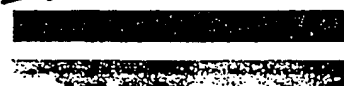


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**Gorbachev, *Perestroyka*, and
Future Soviet Strategic
Offensive Forces**

An Intelligence Assessment

CIA SOV 90-10009JX

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SUMMARY

February 1990

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Gorbachev, *Perestroyka*, and Future Soviet Strategic Offensive Forces

An Intelligence Assessment

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February 1990

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Gorbachev, *Perestroika*, and Future Soviet Strategic Offensive Forces

Key Judgments

Information available
as of 11 February 1990
was used in this report.

The Soviets are continuing to modernize each element of their strategic offensive forces, but since 1988 they have changed several weapon programs in a way that suggests they are planning to deploy smaller forces than originally intended. We conclude that the country's severe economic problems, the new security policies that deemphasize the military, and the increased lethality and survivability of new weapon systems make it highly likely that Moscow will follow through with this revised modernization program—and deactivate some of its older weapons—even in the absence of a START agreement. We calculate that these smaller forces will retain the capability to achieve vital strategic objectives. We conclude that Moscow will depart from this moderated strategic modernization program only if confronted with dramatic changes in Soviet internal conditions or if it projects basic changes in the severity of the threat.

In March 1985 Gorbachev inherited an array of strategic weapon development and deployment programs that were designed to support a comprehensive modernization of Soviet strategic forces. Moscow also confronted robust Western strategic force modernization and severe economic problems, including growing lags in development of the core technologies that were fueling Western military and economic development. Faced with this situation, Gorbachev and other Soviet officials began to question the wisdom of continued military growth. They settled on a strategy that gave new emphasis to the political and economic dimensions of national security, sought to improve relations with the West, and pressed for ambitious arms control initiatives to moderate the threat. Despite the new approach, Moscow did not curtail any ongoing strategic programs, anticipating, in our view, that *perestroika* would support both military and civil objectives while Gorbachev pursued his arms control agenda.

By 1988 the failure of the regime's original economic program, a leadership consensus on reducing defense expenditures, and a steady improvement in US-Soviet relations induced Moscow to make changes in its strategic offensive modernization effort. The Soviets scaled back several intercontinental attack deployment programs, including the SS-18 Mod 5, the SS-24 Mod 2, and the Blackjack bomber. Other deployment programs—the SS-25 and SS-24 Mod 1 mobile ICBMs, the Delta-IV and Typhoon SSBNs, and the Bear H cruise missile carrier—apparently were not affected. This revised strategic modernization program, combined with

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the deactivation of some older weapons, will produce a force by the late 1990s that will be highly capable, although smaller and different in composition from either the current force or the one that was being planned in the mid-1980s:

- The force will contain about 7,500 ballistic missile RVs, bomber weapons, and sea-launched cruise missiles—one-fourth fewer weapons than either the current inventory or the one that we judge was planned in 1985. The number of weapons could still be substantially higher than the proposed START levels because in the absence of a ratified treaty the Soviets probably would retain a large number of RVs on older weapon platforms, such as Delta-class SSBNs.
- The force will have a more balanced distribution of weapons among the legs of the triad. Weapons on silo-based ICBMs would account for about one-quarter of the inventory—as compared with 60 percent of the current force and almost one-half of the future force we judge was planned in 1985. The remaining weapons will be deployed on mobile ICBMs, SLBMs, bombers, and SLCMs

We judge it to be highly likely that Moscow will follow through with this revised modernization program whether or not a START agreement is reached. The Soviets determine their force levels on the basis of their foreign policy goals, their economic capabilities, and their military's analysis of what is required to carry out critical strategic missions. We judge that the military assesses requirements by evaluating capabilities of current and projected weapons against the projected threat and not on the basis of a simple desire for quantitative parity in force levels. In assessing the threat, moreover, the Soviets have become increasingly aware of the relationship between Western perceptions of Soviet programs and political support for Western modernization programs. The Soviets' current policy agenda, persistent economic problems, and improving weapon capabilities—reinforced by Western defense policy debates—all argue for smaller forces:

- The improved lethality and survivability of new Soviet strategic weapons would enable this smaller, modernized force to meet Soviet global damage goals in all but a worst case situation in which Moscow absorbed a US first strike before retaliating. This shortfall—only a few percent of warhead requirements—would be comparable to that which would occur with the current Soviet inventory.

- The revised modernization program facilitates Gorbachev's efforts to undercut support for Western military modernization and to reinvigorate the Soviet economy. We estimate that it will be about 20 percent less costly to execute than the original modernization program and will help free up skilled manpower, high-quality materials, and manufacturing equipment for civilian use

We judge that these new considerations have already augmented Soviet flexibility in START and will have a similar effect in future negotiations. A ratified START treaty, in turn, by constraining US forces, would increase Soviet flexibility to plan for deeper cuts, such as those necessary to reach the force levels—about 3,000 RVs and accountable bomber weapons—envisioned for START II

If the Soviets confront dramatically changed international or domestic conditions, they could depart from the revised strategic force modernization program—in either direction—and do so more readily than they could for comparable changes in general purpose forces:

- The most likely catalyst for an acceleration in force modernization would be a Soviet perception that a revitalized US strategic modernization program was eroding Soviet ability to promptly execute a comprehensive strike against the United States. The ascendancy of a hardline regime also could accelerate modernization. Under these conditions we judge that Moscow would choose to return to—but probably not exceed—the modernization program in place during the mid-1980s. Pressure for a decision on whether to procure additional modernized forces will intensify in the mid-to-late 1990s, as currently deployed weapons reach the end of their normal operational service lives.
- The most likely catalysts for additional cutbacks would be a declining strategic threat, continued economic deterioration, or the adoption of a doctrine of "minimum deterrence." The Soviets could save considerable resources by canceling one or more weapon development program

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We probably would not firmly identify any policy change until we observed changes in the status and pace of strategic deployment programs:

[] Such a decision presumably would be made before completion of the revised modernization programs to avoid the cost of reopening production lines. Moscow, however, could delay a decision until the late 1990s, when follow-on systems to the newer ICBMs are ready for deployment.

- A decision to scale back strategic forces even further might be accompanied by an abrupt halt in one or more ongoing deployment programs.

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